

Serving Communities Work Group Final Charge

*The National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures is working to develop an action agenda for strengthening the nation's approach to protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures. The **Serving Communities** work group will develop recommendations to improve health and well-being within communities by advancing environmental justice and the protection of communities and the environment from harmful chemical exposures.*

Charge

In order to protect communities from harmful chemical exposures and advance environmental justice, the Serving Communities work group will focus its efforts on four overarching themes:

- 1. Community Advocacy, Leadership and Research** –helping communities to advocate for themselves by providing ready access to useful information; building community leadership capability; supporting community-based participatory research; facilitating community members' access to resources, including funding and education; developing a dialog and building trust between all stakeholders; etc.
- 2. Government Operations (Internal and External)** – focus on strengthening governmental responses at the local, state, federal and tribal levels by expanding, enhancing, increasing, and improving: 1) data and evaluation; 2) training; 3) coordination and partnerships; 4) regulation and enforcement; 5) communication and education; 6) operations and practices.
- 3. Addressing Past and Current, and Preventing Future, Environmental and Chemical Exposures** – focus on: assessing current regulatory, enforcement and compliance processes and providing new thinking; encouraging a community-based participatory research approach¹ to the collection and interpretation of data for the purpose of responding to contaminated sites; promoting recognition of low, chronic, synergistic and cumulative exposures on health; and promoting the stimulation of the production and use of safer chemicals through the cooperation of all involved stakeholders.
- 4. Restoring Health and Developing Community Resiliency** – focus on disease prevention and the promotion and enhancement of healthier, sustainable communities; promote integration between environmental and public health governance, practice and infrastructure with the delivery of health care services; and identify and foster approaches which help ensure that emerging government initiatives benefit communities at greatest risk.

¹ Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a "collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community, has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change to improve health outcomes and eliminate health disparities." (WK Kellogg Foundation Community Health Scholars Program)

Background

Chemical exposures from a variety of sources are contributing to poor health outcomes for people across the country. Studies have documented that people of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental harm, and vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and children, are especially at risk. We need to address harmful chemical exposures to better protect communities.

While the public relies on federal, state, local and tribal authorities to protect them from, and inform them of, potential hazardous chemical exposures and provide them with thorough, objective assessments of potential harm associated with chemical exposures, the reality is that this does not always happen. The government must inform communities of potential harmful chemical exposures and provide them with timely, unbiased analyses of the situation and guide appropriate protective and/or remedial measures. Successfully serving the needs of concerned communities requires access to needed data; trained and experienced staff; funding for community groups and federal, tribal, state and local health agencies; working relationships among diverse agencies; clear communication practices; collaborative partnerships with the private sector; and transparent and participatory decision-making processes.